

Family Resource Center (FRC)

Description

The FRC includes the following programs and services:

Intensive Family Support Services (IFSS) in Essex and Sussex County:

Intensive Family Support Services (IFSS) are designed to provide support, education, advocacy, and respite to family members coping with the mental illness of a loved one. Over the past year, IFSS services were delivered in a hybrid format, offering families the option to attend in person or receive services through virtual platforms. Through individual supportive counseling sessions, psychoeducational workshops, family support groups, respite services, and telephone consultations, families learn skills to help them manage the stress associated with caring for a loved one with mental illness.

Family Respite Services “Thursdays” Consumer Drop-In Center:

For over 20 years, IFSS Essex has facilitated “Thursdays,” a consumer drop-in center that meets every Thursday for 2.25 hours, from 6:30 PM to 8:45 PM. Through this service, families are provided with 2.25 hours of out-of-home respite and relief from caring for their loved ones with mental illness. IFSS families have been comforted by the knowledge that their loved ones can get out of the house and make positive social connections with peers, which are both critical to wellness and recovery.

Project F.ER.S.T. – Family Emergency Room Support Team:

Acute Care Family Support (ACFSP), also known as “Project F.ER.S.T.,” is the NJDMHAS-contracted service component that provides in-person support, education, and advocacy to families while their loved ones are in local acute care hospital emergency rooms, accompanying them through the psychiatric screening process. As one of the few community-based acute care family support programs in the state, Project F.ER.S.T. faces unique challenges in receiving referrals from all of the Essex County acute care hospitals, which include three psychiatric screening centers. The success of Project F.ER.S.T. depends on its ability to maintain relationships with screeners and hospital staff, as these relationships generate the majority of its referrals. Consequently, Essex County families benefit from emotional support and education regarding hospital procedures and commitment laws while their loved ones are experiencing a mental health crisis.

Information and Referral Services:

The information and referral (I&R) service component continues to serve as a major gateway for individuals in the general public seeking mental health services or information. This component involves responding to phone requests received at the Montclair, Parsippany, and Newton offices. It also includes responding to requests for mental health services from individuals who walk in off the street, communicate via e-mail, or make inquiries through the agency’s website. These requests for information and referrals are handled by staff, graduate students, and volunteers from the different programs at each agency location.

Personnel

IFSS Essex – One Coordinator/Family Support Specialist, one part-time Family Support Specialist, one full-time Family Support Counselor, and several graduate interns and community volunteers.

IFSS Sussex - One Coordinator/Family Support Specialist and one part-time Family Support Counselors.

“Thursdays” respite group is led by one full-time Family Support Counselor and MHA interns.

Project F.ER.S.T.: One full-time Acute Family Support Counselor

Performance Outcomes

IFSS Essex: The IFSS Essex program produced 3,557 units of service, representing 139% of its overall targeted program commitment for the 2025 fiscal year. Multiple Family Support Groups (169%) significantly exceeded contracted thresholds. Psychoeducational sessions, conducted both in-person and through virtual platforms, also exceeded expectations (179%). Some IFSS families returned to in-person consultations, with many opting to continue virtual telehealth support. Combined, these efforts exceeded targeted goals at 143%. The “Thursdays” drop-in social group for consumers, along with other respite activities, contributed to out-of-home respite services exceeding projections for the year (181%). Collateral contacts also surpassed their target goal this year (178%). Overall, IFSS Essex served 215 families during this fiscal year.

IFSS Sussex: IFSS Sussex produced 2,264 units of service, reaching 131% of its overall targeted program commitment for FY2025. The program exceeded its commitments in several areas, including: total families served (212%), off-site visits (133%), collateral contacts (108%), multi-family support groups (156%), psychoeducational sessions (166%), supportive phone calls (155%), and face-to-face out-of-home respite (86%). IFSS Sussex served 159 families during this fiscal year.

Project F.ER.S.T.: During fiscal year 2025, the Acute Family Support Counselor served 119 families, either through referrals received by hospital emergency departments or through other emergency-based resources such as Co-Response or Mobile Crisis Outreach Response Teams. Additionally, 288 face-to-face offsite follow-up contacts were provided, totaling 435 units of service.

Consumer Satisfaction Surveys

IFSS Essex: Satisfaction with the IFSS program was measured using the NJDMHAS-approved instrument sent out to approximately 123 families in May 2024. With a 26% return rate, 36 questionnaires were returned to MHA’s QA Coordinator, who aggregated the raw data for further analysis. The data showed that 62% of respondents were parents, 21% were siblings, 8% were spouses/partners or significant others, 8% were children or grandchildren, and 2% responded with other relationships but did not specify the nature of the relationship. Families reported a 100% overall satisfaction rate.

IFSS Sussex: IFSS Sussex sent a 24-item survey, standardized and mandated by NJDMHAS for IFSS programs, to approximately 87 families in May 2024. With a 15% return rate, 15 questionnaires were returned to MHA’s QA Coordinator, who analyzed the raw data. The results showed that 73% of respondents were parents, 6% were spouses/partners or significant others, 6% were children or grandchildren, and 13% were siblings. The overall satisfaction level among IFSS Sussex families was determined to be 100%.

Project F.ER.S.T.: To ensure the highest quality of services for families, a questionnaire is provided annually to families who received services. During this past fiscal year, 7 surveys were returned. According to the responses: 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend Project F.ER.S.T. and that they were satisfied with the services they received. Additionally, 100% strongly agreed that they were treated with respect by the Project F.ER.S.T. counselor; 100% reported they coped more effectively with their loved ones' hospitalizations as a result of receiving Project F.ER.S.T. services; and 100% felt supported and listened to by the counselor.

Program Highlights

IFSS Essex: During FY2025, IFSS facilitated 369 family support group sessions. In addition, 161 psychoeducational workshops and 542 consumer respite sessions were conducted to counteract stress related to their loved ones' illnesses.

Family Support Groups: IFSS Essex offered four distinct opportunities for families to engage in professionally facilitated support groups during the past fiscal year: a weekly Thursday morning session, a twice-a-month Wednesday evening session, a monthly evening meeting of adult siblings of people with mental illness, and a twice-a-month Family and Consumer Connection (FCC) group. The FCC is a structured, problem-solving group attended by both family members and mental health consumers to increase understanding of mental illness, improve socialization, teach coping skills, and foster connection.

Psychoeducational Workshops for Families: During the fiscal year, IFSS focused on educating family members about available resources for their loved ones, including local resources such as the Social Security Administration and NAMI chapters. Psychoeducation was also provided on topics such as substance use disorders, bipolar disorder, mood disorders, loneliness, social isolation, building social connections, communication fundamentals, and schizophrenia and psychosis—etiology, symptoms, and treatment.

IFSS Sussex: During FY2025, IFSS Sussex facilitated 455 family support group sessions and 153 psychoeducational program sessions. These programs aimed to teach families and the community about diagnoses, treatment options, available services, and coping skills for caring for loved ones. The psychoeducational series focused on providing information about available resources such as treatment providers and psychiatric screening centers, as well as ways to enhance problem-solving skills.

IFSS Sussex emphasized respite care this year, hosting gatherings for families during the holiday season and beyond. During these gatherings, families were offered a space to socialize and create crafts to memorialize the event. Throughout FY2025, IFSS Sussex provided 31 respite events. At Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital, IFSS Sussex continued to advocate at the monthly Concerned Families Group meetings to assist Sussex County families in advocating for their loved ones hospitalized at Greystone.

“Thursdays” Respite: “Thursdays” has seen an increase in participation, with at least 15 individuals attending each week. Throughout the year, “Thursdays” has offered invaluable activities that incorporate the whole person, such as karaoke, an ice cream social, and attendance at “First Thursday” at the Montclair Art Museum, which is a free community event.

Project F.ER.S.T.: There continues to be a decrease in family accompaniment to emergency departments; therefore, Project F.ER.S.T. staff have had to find creative ways to connect families to this crucial service. Staff attended psychiatric screening team meetings at local hospitals, connected with Co-Response Social

Workers at police departments, and collaborated with Mobile Crisis Outreach Response Teams. Over FY2025, Project F.ER.S.T. served 119 families and provided 147 follow-up contacts. Throughout the year, the program maintained a presence at the monthly Essex County Systems Review Committee meetings, providing opportunities to collaborate with community providers and promote program services.

Information and Referral Services: The continued use of electronic health records allowed multiple MHA sites (Montclair, Parsippany, Newton) to collect and analyze data more efficiently. During FY2024, a total of 852 I&R requests were documented across the agency.

Advocacy Activities

IFSS Essex: Staff attended the Women’s Rights Information Center’s annual event, “Equine and Chocolate,” which was attended by 200 visitors and highlighted the importance of mental health and wellness for families impacted by domestic violence. Staff continued advocacy efforts around affordable, safe housing for family members by hosting the Family Housing Committee. Additionally, staff and interns had a resource table at “TRICH,” a performance held at Luna Stage that tells an intimate, surprisingly funny story about mental health, isolation, and forging a path toward recovery. The Verona Chamber of Commerce, in collaboration with Verona Township, hosted a community wellness fair, during which IFSS staff and interns managed a resource table.

IFSS Sussex: Staff participated in the Sussex County Mental Health Task Force meeting to coordinate with other providers and promote mental health initiatives. Annette Hoffman, alongside Renee Folzenlogen, was interviewed by Professor Derek Malenczak from Rutgers University about the IFSS program; this interview was recorded and presented to students in undergraduate and graduate Rehabilitative Psychology classes. The Branchville Rotary Club featured IFSS at their meeting in May 2025, where mental health was highlighted and local resources discussed.

FY 2026 Goals

IFSS Essex & Sussex: IFSS Essex & Sussex will strengthen their ongoing commitment to empowering families to overcome challenges, reach their personal goals, and enhance their overall well-being. This goal will be achieved through fostering effective communication within families and providing them with the necessary resources and support to navigate complex situations. By equipping families with the tools, knowledge, and connections they need, the programs aim to create lasting positive impacts that promote resilience and stability. Both programs are dedicated to serving a specific number of families in their respective counties, with a goal of reaching 170 families in Essex and 75 families in Sussex each year. Through ongoing outreach, education, and resource provision, IFSS Essex & Sussex strive to build stronger, healthier families and communities, fostering a supportive environment where families can thrive despite life's challenges.

“Thursdays” Respite: The "Thursdays" respite program aims to deepen and expand its role within the community by fostering stronger connections and partnerships that will bring in additional resources, services, and engaging activities for program members. By collaborating with local organizations, community groups, and service providers, the program seeks to create a vibrant and supportive environment that offers diverse social and recreational opportunities tailored to the needs and interests

of participating families. In addition to enhancing the variety of activities, the program will continue to actively encourage families to participate regularly, emphasizing the importance of self-care and providing a much-needed break for caregivers. This respite not only benefits parents and guardians by offering them time to rest, recharge, or attend to personal matters but also provides loved ones with a safe, engaging, and supportive setting. Ultimately, the "Thursdays" respite program strives to strengthen community ties, improve the quality of life for families, and promote a sense of belonging and support for all participants.

Project F.ER.S.T.: Project F.ER.S.T. will strengthen and expand its efforts to deliver critical services within emergency room settings during psychiatric crises involving family members' loved ones. Recognizing the urgent need for immediate intervention, the program will provide rapid support to families facing these challenging situations, ensuring they receive the care and guidance necessary to manage acute mental health emergencies. In addition to offering immediate emotional and practical assistance, Project F.ER.S.T. will continue to serve as a vital resource for helping families navigate the often complex and overwhelming mental health system, connecting them with appropriate services and ongoing support. The program remains committed to its goal of assisting a total of 144 families, ensuring that more individuals and their loved ones receive the timely help they need during their most critical moments.

Information and Referral: As the agency continues to expand its services across Northern New Jersey, the reach of our information and referral system will also grow accordingly. Individuals seeking support will now receive assistance not only in Essex, Morris and Sussex counties but also in Hudson County. This expansion aims to provide more comprehensive and accessible guidance, ensuring that families and community members across these regions can connect with the resources and services they need to address their challenges effectively.